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Mr. Yim, I have the same question for you. Are you starting diverge in your interests with the US, and generally what is your view of the situation?

YIM Sung-joon

- An overview

The security situation on the Korean peninsula in 2018 made a dramatic turn, compared with that of 2017.

Sitting on the same panel at the WPC last year, I told the audience that “South Korea faced the most dangerous national security crisis since the Korean war of 1950-1953,” due to North Korea’s continued provocation by making nuclear bombs and launching ballistic missiles.

Last year, in his address at the United Nations, Mr. Trump threatened to “totally destroy the North” if North Korea continued to test ballistic missiles capable of reaching the continental US.

Undaunted, Kim disavowed Trump’s threat and instead declared that North Korea had become a nuclear state, and they could thwart any military attack against his country with their nuclear arsenal.

Coming into the beginning of 2018, South Korean President Moon Jae-in seized upon the momentum of the Pyeongchang Winter Olympics in order to induce North Korea to enter into an inter-Korean reconciliation process. Within a few months, President Moon met with Kim Jong-un three times and successfully mediated a historical summit meeting between Trump and Kim Jong-Un, the first of its kind. Three historic summits between Moon and Kim, and Trump and Kim produced important documents in the form of a Joint statement which provided a guideline for denuclearisation of North Korea.

- Obstacles and Impediments toward Denuclearisation

But many obstacles and impediments toward denuclearisation remain.

1. Kim Jong-un

Despite Kim Jong-un’s stated commitment toward denuclearisation of North Korea, which appeared in the joint statements at the two Summits with President Moon and President Trump, we don’t know when and how Kim plans to give up his nuclear weapons and ICBMs. He seems to create an appearance of willingness to denuclearise, but none of the agreements indicate any roadmap on establishing a process for denuclearisation. Kim Jong-un’s negotiation style and tactics, known as brinksmanship and a “salami-slicing tactic,” have not changed.

North Korea has imposed a voluntary moratorium on nuclear and long-range missile tests, and it has shut down its underground nuclear test site and missile launch site, without outside inspectors. He appears to be offering to dismantle North Korea’s Yongbyon nuclear complex, a center for producing nuclear materials for bomb making, but only if the US takes “corresponding” steps.

These are the only measures North Korea has taken toward denuclearisation since the Singapore Summit in June 12.

Going into the Singapore Summit, President Trump said publicly that his negotiation goal was “The complete, verifiable and irreversible dismantling” of Pyongyang’s nuclear arsenal. But he accepted North Korea’s preferred language of “denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula,” which could also impose obligations on the United States.

South Korean conservative experts believe that Mr. Kim’s real intention is not to disarm but to use denuclearisation negotiations as a vehicle to make the Korean peninsula safer only for North Korea, by removing the US military presence and getting rid of the international sanctions so it can improve its economic development.

2. Donald Trump

Last year, in concluding my short presentation, I remarked that “continuation of stringent sanctions and a massive show of strength by the US and South Korean military would be the best option to deter North Korean nuclear and missile provocation”.

President Trump deserves credit for his active outreach to North Korea, although not on his own initiative, and commitment toward a peaceful resolution of the North Korean nuclear issue. After the Singapore Summit, he prematurely claimed that Kim Jong-un had agreed to denuclearisation, and that the North Korean nuclear crisis was “largely” solved.

Unlike their hailing President, the bureaucrats and experts in Washington seem to have felt frustration, disappointment and even shock at the poor results of the “historic” summit in Singapore. Nevertheless, President Trump has for the time-being maintained a warm relationship with Kim, praising Kim’s pledge to denuclearise North Korea. Trump has even said “I like him. He likes me. He wrote me beautiful letters. And then we fell in love”.

As a former negotiator with North Korea, I had very high expectations for the outcome of the Trump-Kim Summit in Singapore last year, and I offered fairly positive prospects for the success of the Summit in my comments to the Korean media. On the day of the Summit, I was at a Korean TV News Show as a commentator, and I lost my words for a moment after seeing the Joint Statement.

The current bumps and the diplomatic standstill are largely a result of the Singapore statement. For the first time in the US-NK negotiations, Washington has essentially accepted, whether or not graciously, NK’s wish list on sequencing:

1) Normalisation of relations, 2) a peace regime on the Korean peninsula, and 3) “complete denuclearisation”.

In this regard, Kim Jong-un, who is not content with the little progress that has been made in the working level negotiations, has again pressed for a second summit with Trump. Kim seems to believe that he gained more benefit than Trump, as agreed by critics, who argue that Trump was naive in holding a summit with no preconditions, in the absence of a planned out diplomatic process, and with a ruthless and resourceful foe.

Now Trump may have realized that he will face an acute, personal political embarrassment if the political capital and meeting he has invested in the process turns out to have been for nothing. That will occur if a second summit is held soon between these two impulsive and prickly leaders, and if it does not make a breakthrough for the smooth sailing of the denuclearisation process.

3. President Moon Jae-In

President Moon, a liberal ideologue, has played a prime mover role on the strategic game board. He deserves credit for peace making on the Korean peninsula. From day one of his election, unlike two previous conservative Presidents who are now behind bars, Moon committed himself to forcefully pursue improving inter-Korean relations, which had been frozen for the last 10 years since Ro Moo-hyun, the last liberal President, passed away in 2009. President Moon positioned himself as a mediator between Mr. Trump and Mr. Kim, insisting that to denuclearise the North, Washington must build Mr. Kim’s confidence that his country can survive without nuclear weapons. Mr. Moon, after meeting with



Kim Jong-un three times since April, seemed convinced that Kim had a genuine intention to give up his nuclear weapons in exchange for economic development and better ties with Washington. President Moon also described inter-Korean engagement as crucial to resolving the nuclear standoff.

But the too fast pace of inter-Korean engagement appears to have created a level of unease in Washington, which insists that efforts to improve relations between North and South should move in tandem with efforts to denuclearise the North. In response to the Korean Foreign Minister's suggestion to ease South Korean sanctions imposed in 2010, Mr. Trump said "they won't do it without our approval as a warning".

The US Ambassador to Korea recently reiterated Washington's stance on maintaining sanctions against Pyongyang and openly remarked that South Korea and the US should have a common voice in dealing with North Korea.

Conservative South Koreans also fear that President Moon tilted too much toward Kim Jong-un in pushing for agenda items such as a peace declaration to end the Korean War and lifting international sanctions against North Korea, rather than emphasizing US concerns like requesting the submission of North Korea's nuclear inventory and early verification.